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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000334

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IR

SUBJECT: IRAN: ANONYMOUS CLERICS CALL FOR SUPREME LEADER'S DISMISSAL

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On August 15 an anonymous open letter to the Assembly of Experts from "a group of seminary students in Qom, Mashhad and Esfahan," called for the removal of Supreme Leader Khamenei, claiming that he no longer met the qualifications for the position as stipulated by the Iranian Constitution. The authenticity of the letter is currently unclear, as is the extent to which it represents a significant share of clerical thinking. However what is clear is that due to the recent election and post-election crises, the 'red line' preventing discussion of the question of Supreme Leader's performance is slowly eroding. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On August 15 an anonymous letter from "a group of seminary students in Qom, Mashhad and Esfahan," called for the removal of Supreme Leader Khamenei per Article 111 of the Iranian Constitution. The 11-page letter, which has appeared Iranian expatriate opposition websites and not in any Iranian domestic press, was addressed to the Assembly of Experts (AOE), the body charged with selecting, supervising and if necessary removing the Supreme Leader.

¶3. (C) The letter's tone was unusually strident and accusatory, referring to Khamenei as either "Mr. Khamenei," or "Mr. (Ayatollah) Khamenei." Highlights included the following charges:

- Imam Khomeini's purpose in creating the AOE was (inter alia) to allow the people to supervise the Religious Leader and to prevent a religious dictatorship. But the Guardian Council (its member picked by and loyal to Khamenei) has politicized screening of AOE candidates to allow only Khamenei supporters, such that the AOE has abrogated its supervisory role and allowed a "khalifate and clerical monarchy" to emerge.

- "Mr. Khamenei" is the main official responsible for the current lack of confidence in the government, for the clashes, violence, imprisonments and killings, and he does not deserve to remain in office.

- Khamenei has lost the qualifications cited in Articles 5 and

109 of the Constitution, and per Article 111 the AOE has the responsibility of removing him. The AOE is responsible for the consequences of any delay in executing this duty which leads to a continuation of the current crisis.

¶14. (C) The letter focused both on the fraudulent elections and the subsequent crackdown, to include the current show-trails, stating at one point that "if they take Mr. Khamenei to one of these cells for only one week, he'd confess to a lot more than this [i.e. what the detainees have been forced to confess to].

¶15. (C) The letter follows another open letter on August 13 to AOE President Hashemi Rafsanjani, this time from a minor reformist organization of former Majlis members. It called on the AOE to fulfill its duty as per Article 111, the first part of which reads as follows:

"Whenever the Leader becomes incapable of fulfilling his constitutional duties, or loses one of the qualifications mentioned in Articles 5 and 109, or it becomes known that he did not possess some of the qualifications initially, he will be dismissed. The authority in this matter is vested with the experts specified in Article 108."

¶16. (C) COMMENT: The essential contradiction implicit in the phrase "Islamic Republic" is the source of much of the recent tensions. Many, including "Green Movement" pro-Mousavi oppositionist, ascribe the government's legitimacy to the consent of the governed, given that the Leader is (indirectly) selected by the people, via their AOE representatives; the two letters reflect the opposition's efforts to assert the

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prominence of the people in determining the IRIG's legitimacy. Others, to include the intelligence-security coterie seeking to accumulate and consolidate power, insist that Khamenei's authority is essentially divine in his role as representative of the Twelfth Imam, and as such, challenging Khamenei is akin to challenging God.

¶17. (C) COMMENT (CONT): It is currently not clear whether this letter is genuine and if so, how significant a strain of thinking it represents among Iran's clerical population. A credible IRPO contact with strong ties to the "Green Movement" opposition claims that it is authentic, adding that "seminaries in Iran have been oppressed more than some segments of society especially since June 12 .. the crack is deepening quickly and you will see more letters and more discussions around the letters in the coming weeks." If the preceding is true, it could reflect significant clerical discontent over the recent Presidential election, the subsequent crackdown, and more broadly the ongoing degradation of clerical status in Ahmadinejad's Iran. However, over the course of his twenty-year tenure Khamenei has placed Iran's previously independent clerical infrastructure firmly under his control, as the institutions he controls determine who will study in theological seminaries, who quickly and how high they will advance, and how much money they will receive. As such, it is likely that the clerical class as a whole will follow not lead public opinion. Ultimately what this letter signifies is that at least certain parts of the opposition are not content merely to agitate for Ahmadinejad's removal, but are seeking to break through existing red lines and call into question the performance and authority of Khamenei himself.

EYRE